

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (cancelled)

2. (cancelled)

3. (cancelled)

4. (cancelled)

5. (cancelled)

6. (cancelled)

7. (currently amended)

A method comprising:

providing a programmable snack dispenser ~~as set forth in claim 6;~~ comprising a snack dispenser apparatus adapted to contain a plurality of snack items, an input receiving mechanism operatively connected to the snack dispenser apparatus, and an electronic storage apparatus connected to the snack dispenser apparatus and in communication with the input receiving mechanism, the snack dispenser apparatus being adapted and configured to be altered between a snack inaccessible condition and a snack accessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus resisting access to the snack items when in the snack inaccessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus

facilitating access to at least one of the snack items when in the snack accessible condition, the input receiving mechanism being adapted to enable a user to input identification information into the input receiving mechanism, the electronic storage apparatus being adapted and configured for storage of credit information, the credit information being indicative of a credit amount associated with the identification information, the programmable snack dispenser being adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser apparatus from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon a user inputting the identification information into the input receiving mechanism and the credit information equaling or exceeding a predetermined value, the input receiving mechanism being adapted to enable each user of a plurality of users to input into the input receiving mechanism identification information associated with said each user, the electronic storage apparatus being adapted and configured for storage of credit information for said each user, the credit information for said each user being indicative of a credit amount associated with the identification information for said each user; and

storing in the electronic storage apparatus credit information for said each user of the plurality of users, the credit information for said each user being indicative of a credit amount associated with identification information for said each user.

8. (currently amended)

A method comprising:

providing a programmable snack dispenser ~~as set forth in claim 1;~~ comprising a snack dispenser apparatus adapted to contain a plurality of snack items, an input

receiving mechanism operatively connected to the snack dispenser apparatus, and an electronic storage apparatus connected to the snack dispenser apparatus and in communication with the input receiving mechanism, the snack dispenser apparatus being adapted and configured to be altered between a snack inaccessible condition and a snack accessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus resisting access to the snack items when in the snack inaccessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus facilitating access to at least one of the snack items when in the snack accessible condition, the input receiving mechanism being adapted to enable a user to input identification information into the input receiving mechanism, the electronic storage apparatus being adapted and configured for storage of credit information, the credit information being indicative of a credit amount associated with the identification information, the programmable snack dispenser being adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser apparatus from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon a user inputting the identification information into the input receiving mechanism and the credit information equaling or exceeding a predetermined value; and

storing in the electronic storage apparatus credit information for each of a plurality of users, the credit information for each of the plurality of users being indicative of a credit amount associated with identification information for said each of the plurality of users.

9. (currently amended)

A method comprising:

providing a programmable snack dispenser as set forth in claim 1; comprising a snack dispenser apparatus adapted to contain a plurality of snack items, an input receiving mechanism operatively connected to the snack dispenser apparatus, and an electronic storage apparatus connected to the snack dispenser apparatus and in communication with the input receiving mechanism, the snack dispenser apparatus being adapted and configured to be altered between a snack inaccessible condition and a snack accessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus resisting access to the snack items when in the snack inaccessible condition, the snack dispenser apparatus facilitating access to at least one of the snack items when in the snack accessible condition, the input receiving mechanism being adapted to enable a user to input identification information into the input receiving mechanism, the electronic storage apparatus being adapted and configured for storage of credit information, the credit information being indicative of a credit amount associated with the identification information, the programmable snack dispenser being adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser apparatus from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon a user inputting the identification information into the input receiving mechanism and the credit information equaling or exceeding a predetermined value; and

receiving a first amount of money from a first user;

receiving a second amount of money from a second user;

storing in the electronic storage apparatus a first credit information, the first credit information having a value dependent on the first amount of money received from the first user, the first credit information being associated with first identification information, the first identification information being information identifying the first user;

storing in the electronic storage apparatus a second credit information, the second credit information having a value dependent on the second amount of money received from the second user, the second credit information being associated with second identification information, the second identification information being information identifying the second user.

10. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 9 wherein:

the snack dispenser is adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser apparatus from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon the first identification information being input into the input receiving mechanism and the first credit information equaling or exceeding the predetermined value;

the snack dispenser is adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser apparatus from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon the second identification information being input into the input receiving mechanism and the second credit information equaling or exceeding the predetermined value.

11. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 10 wherein the input receiving mechanism comprises a key reader, the method further comprising:

providing a first key to the first user, the first key having stored thereon the first identification information, the key reader being adapted to read the first identification information upon the first key being positioned in communication with the key reader;
and

providing a second key to the second user, the second key including the second identification information, the second key having stored thereon the second identification information, the key reader being adapted to read the second identification information upon the second key being positioned in communication with the key reader.

12. (cancelled)

13. (original)

A method comprising:

providing a vending key to a user, the vending key including electronically readable identification information relating to the user;

providing a programmable snack dispenser, the snack dispenser including a key reader adapted to read the identification information on the vending key;

programming the snack dispenser with credit information associated with the vending key;

configuring the snack dispenser such that when the user positions the vending key relative to the key reader in a manner to enable the vending key to be read by the key reader, then the programmable snack dispenser determines whether the credit information is sufficient to warrant dispensing of a snack from the snack dispenser.

14. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 13 wherein the vending key comprises a vending card and wherein the key reader comprises a card reader.

15. (original)

A method comprising:

accessing a snack dispenser having a key reader adapted to read a vending key, the snack dispenser being adapted to determine whether to permit vending of a snack item from the snack dispenser by comparing information on the vending key to information which is stored in the snack dispenser and associated with the vending key; and

placing the vending key adjacent the key reader in a manner to enable the snack dispenser to vend the snack item.

16. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 15 further comprising removing the snack item from the snack dispenser.

17. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 15 wherein the snack dispenser is adapted to permit vending of the snack item if credit information stored in the snack dispenser indicates that a holder of the vending key has sufficient credit to purchase the desired item.

18. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 15 wherein the snack dispenser comprises an electronic storage apparatus in communication with the key reader, the electronic storage apparatus being adapted and configured for storage of credit information, the credit information being indicative of a credit amount associated with identification information stored on the vending key.

19. (original)

A method as set forth in claim 15 wherein the vending key comprises a vending card and wherein the key reader comprises a card reader.

20. (original)

A snack dispensing method comprising:
providing first and second vending keys, the first key having electronically-readable first identification information stored thereon, the second key having electronically-readable second identification information stored thereon, the second identification information being different than the first identification information;

providing a programmable snack dispenser, the snack dispenser including a key reader, the key reader being adapted to read the first identification information stored on the first key when the first key is positioned in communication with the key reader, the key reader being adapted to read the second identification information stored on the second key when the second key is positioned in communication with the key reader, the snack dispenser containing a plurality of snack items, the snack dispenser being alterable between a snack inaccessible condition and a snack accessible condition, the snack dispenser in the snack inaccessible condition resisting access to the snack items, the snack dispenser in the snack accessible condition facilitating access to at least one of the snack items, the snack dispenser further comprising an electronic storage apparatus adapted and configured for storage of first credit information and second credit information, the first credit information being indicative of a credit amount associated with the first key, the second credit information being indicative of a credit value associated with the second key, the snack dispenser being adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon the key reader reading the first identification information and the first credit information equaling or exceeding a predetermined value, the snack dispenser being adapted and configured to alter the snack dispenser from the snack inaccessible condition to the snack accessible condition upon the key reader reading the second identification information and the second credit information equaling or exceeding a predetermined value;

storing the first credit information in the snack dispenser; and

storing the second credit information in the snack dispenser.